generals, that is the ones who have several camps under their command, have at least one wife in each camp. C 622

Two or three days after delivery, mother and child wash, the new mother resting for only that length of time. C M 846

The father acknowledges his child and takes it into his arms with the following words: "This is my child." In some tribes it is customary for the husband to take to his bed when his wife is in labor, as an act of acknowledgement; and among the Chiriguanos the man takes his place beside his wife and for three days is cared for as if he had... given birth to a child! Then he gets up, but does not make any trips or work until seven days have elapsed, after which period the wife also gets up and washes. While the couple is in labor they eat nothing but water and a pap made with corn and bean broth; they abstain from eating meat.

It is quite common for a man to have two or more sisters simultaneously as wives. I can also give assurance that every now and then a father will not disdain even his own daughter. If no one will acknowledge a child as his own the mother may kill it. M 595 [588] [847]

The Indians are very skilled midwives: the white settlers themselves use their services. It is said that they are extraordinarily expert in taking advantage of the precise moment of crisis, holding the patient in a more or less straight position, apparently even shaking her, but without doing her harm. To this activity they add words to which the Indians attribute [185] virtue and to which the whites, who do not understand them, ascribe even more. So is it always! M 844

Let it not be thought, however, that in the matter of love-making they limit their efforts to a more or less expressive pantomime. The fact is that they have words and expressions and a language which lend themselves admirably to amorous declarations and which they use. The harmoniousness of the Guaraní language is well known to all, it might even be said that it is too much so when used by the men and by the Chiriguanos, whose mother tongue it also is. But even the Matacos, the rude, unpolished Matacos who seem to be the last on the anthropological scale of all these South American Indians, have their harmonious expressions and the well-bred ideas which correspond to them. C M 832

I remember an occasion on board ship when there was among us a good looking Indian woman who was quiet, impassive and even M 832

732

which even in the most favorable physical circumstances can occur quite often among children who are the offspring of parents who are too closely consanguineous. Marriages of this type (between close relatives) are not rare here, and -- this is not just an extra trip bearing grist for my mill -- I have been assured that of the very small number of defective persons these latter, the deaf-mute, are the least rare among the Indians of these parts; among whom, let it be said, I have not seen a single cretin or cotudo [coto is a malignant swelling of the throat -- Translator] and that in spite of the fact that aberrants of this type abound in the north and western part of the Republic.

To come back to my deaf-mute: The occasion of my meeting him was brought about by his having been attacked by a tiger [jaguar--Translator] which mauled him horribly while he was gathering firewood. (This is one further proof as to the difficulty of putting up a successful struggle for life in these waste places if one is not in the full possession of all one's senses). We were called to treat the poor wretch, but he refused our ministrations energetically, preferring to put himself in the hands of the witch doctors.

Despite what I have stated above, the Indians themselves [847] have assured me that it sometimes [222] happens that a mother will allow her children to die if their father or any other man who will care for them dies or goes away.

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However, this must happen only very seldom (and does not weaken our argument regarding the handicapped) for among the inhabitants of a given village and particularly between relatives there exists a truly charming sharing of goods -- yet when food is scarce one may suppose that the phenomenon is more common. But such a state of food scarcity is probably felt less owing to the great variety of foods acceptable to the Indians and their really remarkable adaptability to the availability of food: they can live on a very skimpy diet when need arises, and then gorge themselves with a vengeance when they hit a time of plenty.

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The elasticity of the stomachs of these savages is truly extraordinary. When not on the march a mouthful of food is enough for them; while fresh air, the exertions of the hunt, of fishing, of harvesting and of traveling in pursuit of these activities

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2: Karsten E-5 (1911-1913)1932 SI7 Mataco SI7

Choroti SK6

## CHAPTER IV.

### Courtship and marriage.

A salient feature in the social life of all Chaco tribes, and one in which they differ considerably from the tribes whom I learned to know in tropical South America, is the great sexual liberty allowed to young people before marriage. As soon as a girl has passed her first menstruation she is considered free to choose for herself occasional lovers, and generally she does not delay in making use of this right. This free sexual life is particularly indulged in during the algaroba season, in connection with the feasts and dances which then take place. The girls avoid the natural consequences of this sexual license by abortion or infanticide, customs which are also approved by the social morality of the Chaco Indians. Having enjoyed this free life for some years, the girl ultimately decides to marry, and then as a rule becomes a faithful wife as long as the husband does not himself neglect his duties towards her. This general state of things is met with all along the Pilcomayo, although customs of course differ to some extent in different tribes. I shall first relate the customs practised among the Choroti in courtship and marriage.

The *Choroti* are a strictly monogamous people. During my stay among the different Choroti tribes I never found a single case of polygamy, and I was moreover able to confirm that polygamy is strongly disapproved of by custom and the social morality of the people. It is first of all rendered impossible by the jealousy of the women who, as I have mentioned before, have a decisive influence in matters of love and take the first step towards contracting marriage.

Courtship therefore among the Choroti assumes rather a peculiar form, inasmuch as the girls play the active, and the young men the passive part. Marriages are as a rule contracted during the algaroba season from November to March, when there is a good supply of food in the villages and

2: Karsten E-5 (1911-1913)1932 SI7 Mataco SI7

## Chapter VII.

### Abortion and infanticide.

The custom of infanticide has already been touched upon, and as a matter of fact it is found among all Chaco tribes. The Indians do not consider a new-born child an independent personality, and it is looked upon as being so entirely the property of the parents that these have full right to do with it what they like. If for some reason or other the parents do not like to keep it they can destroy it, and such cases are by no means rare. Still it is necessary to point out certain facts with regard to infanticide as practised by the Indians, since the custom has not seldom been misunderstood by Europeans. The Indians do not kill their children from a lack of natural parental feelings; on the contrary, it must be emphasized that the savage Indian loves his offspring just as tenderly as do civilized people. Further, the Indians do not kill normal children except in such comparatively rare cases as those mentioned in the last chapter. A regular custom of killing for instance new-born female children does not exist. Infanticide is mainly practised in the case of children who are born in some way abnormal or under abnormal circumstances. In the first place it is superstitious fear that induces the Indian to kill his children. According to the Indian idea monstrous or in some way deformed children, or children which in general are born very sickly, cannot have been conceived in a natural way; they must have come into being through the operation of a demon. Indian myths, to which I shall refer later on, have much to tell about women who became pregnant in a supernatural way, during bathing or otherwise, and in consequence gave birth, not to a human child, but to a monster. Such a monster is looked upon with horror and regarded as a most ominous thing not only for the family concerned but for the whole village. It is an evil spirit that is born in the midst of the Indians and which will visit the whole community with sick-

847 [858] 845

2: Karsten E-5 (1911-1913)1932 S17 Mataco S17
Toba S112



ness and misfortune. Thus the Choroti expressly declared to me that if at birth a child is very sickly or deformed, this is due to its being possessed by an evil *möhsek* (spirit), and they therefore generally kill the child at once. The Mataco call their evil spirits *aittáh* and regard a monster as an *aittáh* personified. Similarly the Tobas believe that a sick child is possessed by a demon (*peyák*), or is itself such a demon, and owing to the close connection which there is between the child and its parents, this may entail unfortunate consequences for the parents also, nay, for the whole tribe.

Father Cardús relates that when among the Tobas a woman dies in child-birth, the new-born child is buried alive with its mother's body [1]). I do not believe that such a custom is practised by the Tobas of to-day, but it may well have existed formerly. A woman who dies in childbirth is always regarded by the Indians with superstitious fear, since the accident is explained as an operation of evil spirits to which the woman has fallen a victim. But the new-born child with its mother forms, as it were, one single personality; consequently the child also is regarded as being possessed. Besides, a sucking child which is bereft of its mother is also left without nutrition since, according to Indian ideas, a new-born babe can only be nourished with the milk of its own mother, and would thus die in any case.

We may of course also assume that practical considerations have led the Indians to infanticide. The Indians understand that a sickly or deformed child has scarcely any chance of developing into a strong man and a useful member of society. In the hard struggle for existence under which the Indian lives it may even be merciful to destroy him. I believe however that such considerations play only a subordinate part in the custom of infanticide, which must first of all be explained by superstition.

The same custom prevails with regard to *twins*. Among all tribes the second is generally killed. The birth of twins is among all Pilcomayo tribes looked upon as an unnatural and most ominous thing, since the Indians consider that one man cannot become the father of two children at once. The second, consequently, must be the offspring either of another man or of an evil spirit. Besides, the Indians say that a woman has not sufficient milk to nourish two babes at the same time, and from this point of view also twins are regarded as unlucky. The Indian woman, who has to work hard, is anxious not to bear more children than she is able to nourish and to take care of. In a Choroti family three or four

[1]) Cardús *op. cit.* p. 263.

2: Karsten E-5 (1911-1913)1932 SI7 Mataco SI7



In a Chenti family three or four children, arriving at intervals of two or three years, seemed to me to be the rule. Among the Tobas and the Mataco the children were somewhat more numerous, especially in families where the man had two or more wives. Whether the matter is or is not arranged by abortion, I cannot say. 163

Abortion is practised by unmarried women who become pregnant in consequence of their sexual licentiousness. I have never seen unmarried women with children in any tribe. Married women also have recourse to feticide or infanticide when they have been abandoned by their husbands. Similarly, as I have stated before, a Toba man may kill the newborn child of his married daughter if his son-in-law has incurred his dislike. 847.

Abortions are effected by the Chaco women by mechanical treatment. The woman kills the foetus by beating her abdomen and after that presses it out with her thumbs. She may perform the operation herself or be aided by some old woman. This is done fairly early, generally in the third or fourth month of pregnancy. The operation is said to cause the woman some pain, but does not seriously affect her health. Poisonous drugs or other abortive means are not used by the Chaco Indians.

If the Indians find nothing immoral in infanticide, this of course is still less the case with abortion. It is wholly a private affair of the woman or of her family, with which the community as such does not interfere. A feticide certainly does not cause her more remorse than the extraction of a tooth. Custom is very strict on this point, not only among the Chaco tribes but among all South American Indians.

3: Metraux E-5 (1933) 1939 SI7 Mataco SI7



A pregnant woman must avoid sexual intercourse if she does not want to incur disgrace by having twins.

To avoid accidents and to facilitate delivery, pregnant women use certain medicines, especially the *litsitáx* root which they toast and pound into a powder in a mortar. They never wear belts or stretch themselves lest the child take a wrong position. The woman brings the child to birth in a squatting posture, she holds on to a stick at this time. Her husband and an old woman give her any assistance she may need. The afterbirth is buried and the navel is cauterized with the burning stem of a gourd. At the birth, the father picks up the child and it bears his likeness, but if ist is picked up by someone else the child will resemble that person. When twins are born, which seems to occur very seldom, one is taken by the mother of the woman and is brought up as her own child.

Woman cause abortion by using a certain plant (*nLọt*) which looks like manioc. The root is ground and taken with water. The sterilizing effect of this drug may last for two, four, or eight years.

c) *Names*

The name is given by the father when the child is from one to three years old. The father may dream of an animal, an object, a sentence or a word pronounced by one of the charcters in his dream, and this becomes the name of the child. A name is often distorted, a fact which explains their queer form. For instance *čalax* »black woman» has become *načalax* and *apan-toi* »bread», *hapʔap*.

d) *Marriage*

The suiter may get the approval of his future father-in-law by giving him money or cattle, but very often the authorization of the girl's father is far less essential than that of the mother. If she opposes the marriage there is absolutely nothing that can be done. It may happen that the father

855 and carry on, his mother essayed to see whether dragging him off to some distance from the hut would help, but he struggled and rolled on the ground. Finally she controlled him and, without any short temperedness, and laughing all the time she set him down a few yards from the house where the child continued to cry but did not dare to return.

857 861 This same gentleness and absence of brutality can be observed among playing children. Thus, on numerous occasions I have been able to observe little children vying for possession of a small ball; they would push and charge into each other, but never maliciously or violently. Mataco education stresses sweetness and gentleness and a [157] violent man or one of evil character (witsax) [? Translator] inspires them with fear and disgust. From the tenderest age children learn to share their food. When I used to distribute candy the children would never fail to let the absent ones know so that they might have a part of what was being given.

## Abortion and Infanticide

847 Abortion and infanticide used to be practiced by the Matacos on a large scale, as also among the other Chaco tribes. According to my informants, a woman has an abortion when she is pregnant and not married; when she has been abandoned by her husband or, after a quarrel with him, for vengeance. Many women undergo abortions when they are [12] pregnant for the first time, in the hope that such action will make future deliveries easier.

It is very generally held that the Chaco Indian women use powerful drugs to cause abortion, but this is doubtless merely legendary. The aids of which they make use are purely mechanical. During the fifth month after conception they get a friend to pound them on their abdomen until the blood begins to flow.

## Marriage

832 In amorous relations the young girls appear to take more of the initiative than do the men. They easily become provocative and make

5: Fock E-5 (1962) 1963 SI7 Mataco SI7



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Fig. 2.—Two Mataco girls electing partners among the younger men, who are performing their nightly chain-dance. Nowadays, especially the young men wear European rags. Flash-phot. Fock.

Formerly,

582 it was customary that two bands lived close to each other as, for example, the satnáy and sitóy, and consequently the girls from the satnáy preferred to marry men of the sitóy band, and girls of the sitóy men of the satnáy band. The two bands became so inter-married that "the whole thing was like one band", and the two chiefs were able to discuss questions of dispute. Here, therefore, developments had gone in the direction of forming temporary, loose marriage classes. The descent rules of the Mataco are patrilinear, so that, theoretically, exogamy should not impede cross-cousin marriage. In the meantime, there is no example of this practice, the nearest case being a single instance of a man's marriage to a sister's daughter. These cases must presumably be understood as expressing a man's wish to preserve his original locality. This is theoretically only possible in a matri-local exogamous patrilineal system by marrying one's sister's daughter.

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583 It has been mentioned that a young man and girl who move in together always move to the house of the girl's family. Here they merely dwell temporarily, as a rule for about a year, so that the girl can give birth to her first child with the advice and assistance of her mother. The previous sexual relations of the girl are considered as trial marriages, but the birth of the child is regarded as the final test, whereafter she and the child's father are deemed to be married. She is then called *enutsha tahayáy*. Should a girl prove with child during a trial marriage,

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5: Fock E-5 (1962) 1963 SI7 Mataco SI7



583 this will not influence her choice and that of her parents. An abortion will be
581 produced artificially should the man prove to be inacceptable. Should the girl
847 prove to be pregnant at a time when she has started a new, more stable, relation, the new young man will demand that she aborts.

585 Thus the consummation of the marriage, the creation of a family, is, for the
591 Mataco, identical with the commencement of a completely valid marriage. As a rule the family moves shortly after the birth to its own hut, though still near
[178] the girl's parents. Village matrilocality is permanent, and until about 40 years
[342] ago, when communal houses were still the most common, the sharing of a hut with the wife's family for a whole lifetime, was the rule.

593 Already in connexion with her initiation each girl is given certain advice by
[881] her mother concerning the proper behaviour as a married person. The mother
[867] will tell her, for example, that she must treat her coming in-laws as though they
[606] were her own parents and that she must always be generous when it is a matter of sharing food with them. She will also counsel the girl to show respect to her future husband, fetching fuel, for example, when he is away fishing, and ensuring that there is plenty of water for him when he returns from hunting. Willingness to cooperate and mutual respect are very typical of the relations between man and wife. The man's position in marriage is formally the same. He must regard his
[606] wife's parents as his own, must be generous to them, though in fact they do not treat him with the same indulgence they would show a son. In any conflict that may arise they side with the daughter against the husband. Should he not be sufficiently industrious he will be sent out to fish or hunt, and if unsuccessful he will be reproached, something that no Mataco would do to a son. If a man quarrels with his mother-in-law he is chased away. His happiness depends to a high degree upon an equable temperament and ability to obtain food. But as his wife will
[476] always share his bag with relations and friends, and because matrilocality prevails, the wife's family will always obtain the lion's share of what he brings back.

606 The position of a son-in-law as a stranger in another band also raises difficulties
609 for him. In case of dispute his wife's family or other local people will be able to say: "We don't know him and don't trust him". Perhaps he has no kin in the village to vouch for him and give him assistance. The position of a son-in-law can thus be compared to that of a stranger in a big city, irresponsible because he is unknown, and overlooked for that reason.

593 The mutual relations of married couples are naturally stamped by matrilo-
[554] cality and the woman's very considerable occupational effort, which together give the wife a good social position in relation to her husband. In the meantime it is more through the wife's family that this status is manifested. As between the sexes the husband still dominates. As a rule it is the husband who has the say, but it is often the woman who decides what is to be said. The latent tension
[182] between family and sex results in a curiously unintegrated behaviour. By day a man and wife behave almost like strangers to each other. They are extremely terse

6:Métraux E-5 (no date) 1943 SI7 Mataco SI7



forced the already uncounscious patients to swallow salt water and so to vomit the poison, but as soon as they came to themselves they struggled against the missionary in their will to die. Their resistance to care was overcome only with the help of several other persons. Both of them recovered but remained depressed for a long time afterwards.

Shortly after these events the deserted wife gave birth to a boy. She evinced no interest in the baby and wanted to kill him. The child's grandmother and other relatives, especially the women, opposed her intention and brought the baby to the missionary who tried without decided to resort to bribery and laid before the mother cloth and corn from the store, which he promised to give her if she suckled the baby. To this temptation the woman finally yielded. As soon as she had suckled the boy his life was safe, for a woman never kills an infant once she has nursed it.

*Sixth case.* Here the main character in the drama was Ipatsi, a 17 year old girl. She was an orphan whose sole relative in the village was a classificatory grandmother. She and her husband (25 years old) were incongenial and quarreled almost constantly. Then one day she poisoned herself. Her grandmother, who noticed the effects of the sachasandia late the same evening, sent a child to inform the missionary in charge. He arrived soon afterwards and found the girl conscious but very weak. She was crying hysterically. A few women who were standing nearby watched the scene in a detached way. Her husband sat on the edge of the bed, but seemed sulky and indifferent to her plight. Thanks to an emetic, she recovered. A few days later she departed from the her husband, despite the fact that she had given birth to a child.

*Seventh case.* Bertie, a boy of 14, ate sachasandia three times in one week and each time was saved by the missionary. He himself gave the following explanation for his attempted suicide. Teresa, whose case was described above, had cast her eyes upon him although he was distantly related to her. The boy's father encouraged her and insisted that Bertie marry her although he showed the greatest reluctance and insisted that he was still a child. Neither the girl nor his father would listen to him so that the boy had no peace and "could not sleep at night". At last he took poison. His plight aroused little sympathy except in his elder sister and, of course, in Teresa. The father died soon after the attempted suicide and so Bertie did not have to marry Teresa.

*Eight case.* The victim was a boy of 16 whose bright and cheerful disposition made him generally popular. He had joined the mission

avail to persuade the mother to receive her child. The missionary